

Needed: A New Paradigm

Ensuring social sustainability in fish trade for small-scale fishers entails recognizing their economic contribution, and devoting public resources for policy

Fisheries and its value chains are a key source of employment and food security for more than 120 mn people worldwide. They include men, women, girls and boys living close to the coast, on a floodplain, along a river or a lake in developed and developing countries, and who are engaged in fish and fish-products harvesting and related ancillary activities. Fish and fish-related products are among the most traded commodities globally, and the proportion of the harvested fish entering the global market has continuously risen in recent years. As a result of globalization, seafood value chains are increasingly complex

Participating in markets for small-scale fishers is not always easy. Some of the main constraints include lack of roads, landing sites and market facilities, poor technology and insufficient technical skills to produce safe and quality food. Additionally, overexploitation of resources and degradation of supporting habitats and ecosystems reduce the available resources. This is exacerbated by the lack of secure tenure rights for aquatic resources and competition over resources with other sectors such as tourism, aquaculture, agriculture, energy, mining and infrastructure development.

Despite their significant economic and societal contribution, small-scale fishers and fishworkers are often marginalized in economic, political and social terms. As a result, fisheries-dependent communities often live in poverty, and child labour and poor occupational safety and health are common issues affecting this group. Fishing remains one of the most hazardous occupations, reporting over 24,000 casualties per year, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Operational costs

When it comes to large-scale operations, pressure to reduce operational costs and maintain or increase profitability is also increasing, which raises the incentives to use cheaper labour and neglect social and ethical considerations and human dimensions. As a result, the use of migrant workers, working in sub-optimal conditions, has increased, facilitated by the use of illegal networks of brokers and often illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing happens.

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and fragmented, encompassing different locations for harvesting, processing, transport and distribution, often across multiple national boundaries.

Of the people engaged in the fisheries sector, more than 97 per cent live in developing countries and an estimated 90 per cent are employed in the small-scale fisheries sector. Among these, women represent more than half of the total workforce in small-scale fisheries and tend to perform the major bulk of the processing tasks. They are often exposed to poor occupational safety and health conditions, are poorly organized and have weak bargaining power, compared to other actors across the value chain.

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Whether in large-scale or small-scale fisheries, the sad reality is that human-rights violations, and labour abuses, are widespread throughout the industry, including the post-harvest sector and aboard fishing vessels as a result of loopholes in fisheries and labour policies and legislation in both developed and developing countries.

In recent years, a renewed attention has sparked towards the fisheries sector, often fuelled by media reports on instances of severe abuses linked to global value chains. But the news is not only gloomy as, in response, several initiatives have emerged. Governments, the private sector, auditing and certification schemes, the media and civil society organizations are starting to adopt approaches to address human- and labour-rights violations. Social sustainability, in fact, has become the new frontier in the sector. Particularly, recent progress have been made in the international regulatory framework concerning the adoption

and implementation of binding and non-binding legal and regulatory instruments.

In November 2016, the tenth instrument of ratification of the ILO Work in Fishing Convention was deposited. As a result, the Convention will enter into force on 17 November 2017, setting minimum standards for working and living conditions on board fishing vessels. The Convention applies to all types of commercial vessels, including those in small-scale fishing, for which some flexibility in the implementation by Member States is allowed. In 2016, another key international labour instrument entered into force: the ILO Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930. The Protocol establishes obligations to eradicate forced labour, protect victims and provide them with access to remedy, while establishing a link between forced labour and human trafficking.

The FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food

FAO/GIULIO NAPOLITANO



Nishiki Market, Kyoto, Japan. Ensuring that small-scale fisheries communities can prosper, have a voice, are empowered, and are able to fully benefit from participation in markets will require a comprehensive approach

Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) are now being implemented at the global, regional and national levels. The Guidelines complement the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and contains guiding principles for governments, fishers' representatives and any other actors concerned with small-scale fishing communities. The application of the Guidelines should be grounded in human-rights principles such as consultation and participation, gender equality and equity, as well as address key thematic areas such as social development, employment and decent work, post-harvest value chain, trade and gender equality.

In 2016, the FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) entered into force as the first legally binding instrument to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing. FAO is supporting the capacity of national authorities to establish inspections schemes of foreign fishing vessels and, as of 30 June 2017, 48 countries have become parties to the Agreement. Through its implementation, foreign

and standards-setting programmes are beginning to include social issues in their programmes, and expand beyond ecological sustainability. Some of the issues covered by these standards include community involvement, human rights, labour rights, employment conditions, and workers' health and safety. There is also an increased attention to include the respect of human rights in bilateral trade agreements as a requirement to gain access to markets in Europe and North America. In exporting countries, commodity platforms are bringing together non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and workers' representatives around fisheries-improvement programmes.

Recently, academics teamed up to define a conceptual framework on social responsibility in the seafood sector. The framework is based on international instruments and encompasses three main pillars: (a) respect for human rights, dignity and access to resources; (b) ensuring equality and equitable opportunity to benefit; and (c) improving food and livelihood security. It calls for increased participation of social scientists in ocean science, given the key linkages between social and ecological sustainability.

The following are all key issues that will need to be addressed in the near future, but the time is now ripe for a new paradigm in the sector that reconciles ecological and social sustainability:

- How to ensure fishers and fisheries-dependent communities will participate and prosper in growing market-based initiatives?
- How will the specificities of the sector be taken into account?
- How can power imbalances within value chains be smoothened, and through which mechanisms?
- How can regional organizations and governments effectively work to create an enabling environment for the development of fisheries communities?
- What role can private-sector actors, including certification and labelling programmes, play?

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fishing vessels engaged, and believed of having engaged, in illegal fishing activities can be denied using port facilities.

The Agreement is accompanied by other instruments such as the FAO Global Record and the Voluntary Guidelines on Catch Documentation Schemes to increase transparency and traceability of fish catch. The PSMA is a cost-effective instrument, and its joint implementation, along with other instruments (such as the ILO Work in Fishing Convention), has the potential to reduce fish caught illegally while sometimes the reliance on exploited workers is brought on the table of consumers.

Pitching an increasing demand for ethically harvested food, certifications-

The Agenda 2030 advocates for “leaving no one behind”, and implementing the Agenda will entail creating bridges across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These, in fact, are not silos, and it will be important to foster inter-ministerial collaboration at the national level. Efforts are being made jointly to end poverty (SDG1), hunger and malnutrition (SDG2), achieve universal access to healthcare (SDG3), along with promoting gender equality (SDG5), and efforts to ensure that economic growth is sustained, inclusive and sustainable (SDG8) and, of course, addressing the health of oceans and communities depending on it (SDG 14).

During the first week of September 2017, in the framework of the Sixteenth Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries' Sub-committee on Fish Trade, a special agenda item featured 'Social sustainability in fisheries value chains and the link to fish trade'. Governments representatives were asked to provide guidance on how FAO, along with other partners, can advance and promote more sustainable fish value chains within the sector.

Ensuring that small-scale fisheries communities can prosper, have a voice, are empowered, and are able to fully benefit from participation in markets will require a comprehensive approach. This entails recognizing the economic contribution of small-scale fisheries to the sector, and devoting public resources for the implementation of appropriate strategies and policies. Therefore, a key component will be building political will at the national and international levels.

FAO will continue to work holistically to promote the wellbeing of fisheries- and oceans-dependent communities while preserving environmental sustainability. Partnerships across the UN system, with fishers and fishworker organizations, NGOs and the private sector, are key. FAO will continue to play a facilitating role through its Vigo Dialogue, a multi-stakeholder platform centered



Cambodian women are occupied with fish transformation, such as drying and smoking fish or producing fish paste, the famous *Prahok*

on the benefits and challenges of promoting decent employment in fisheries and aquaculture.

A key component of the FAO strategy will be building the capacity of member countries to adopt national strategies that break the existing vicious cycle of poverty, lack of access to financial, social and productive services, and alternative livelihood opportunities for youth and women, while addressing overfishing, along with degradation of ecosystems and sub-optimal working conditions in the fisheries sector. This will require supporting countries to adopt institutional and legal frameworks to protect and promote small-scale fisheries. Specific initiatives and support will build the capacity of women and youth to reap the benefits of market participation. Skills development programmes for youth, and the dissemination of appropriate and gender-sensitive technologies will ensure efficient value chains with reduced food waste and loss.

Finally, any strategy needs to be centered around ensuring consultation, participation and the voices of small-scale fisheries, as the main driver of changes in the sector, at national, regional and international levels.

For more



<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5980e.pdf>
Scoping Study on Decent Work and Employment in Fisheries and Aquaculture. Issues for Actions and Programming

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7091e.pdf>
Vigo Dialogue on Benefits of Decent Employment in Fisheries and Aquaculture

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-bc014e.pdf>
The Role of Women in the Seafood Industry